

IN THE CLAIMS:

Cancel claims 1-20, inclusive, without prejudice or disclaimer.

Claims 1-20 (canceled)

Please add the following claims:

21. (New) An apparatus for manufacturing an optical element of a molded article comprising:

an upper mold and a lower mold capable of being separated and approaching each other, each of the upper mold and the lower mold comprising a forming surface, a regulator for regulating the upper mold and the lower mold to align the axes thereof, a forcible releasing means for releasing a molded article adhered to a forming surface by contacting at least a rim portion of the molded article,

a moving means for moving the forcible releasing means relative to the upper mold or the lower mold such that, in the course of the separation by the upper mold or the lower mold, the forcible releasing means contacts at least a rim portion of the molded article to release the molded article from the forming surface.

22. (New) The apparatus of Claim 21, wherein the moving means moves the forcible releasing means in conjunction with movement of the upper mold or lower mold in the course of separation of the upper mold and the lower mold.

23. (New) The apparatus of Claim 22, wherein the regulator regulates the upper mold and the lower mold by direct contact with the upper mold and the lower mold.

24. (New) The apparatus of Claim 23, wherein the regulator comprises a drum.

25. (New) The apparatus of Claim 24, wherein the regulator guides vertical movement of the forcible releasing means.

26. (New) The apparatus of Claim 23, wherein the forcible releasing means is capable of releasing the molded article adhered to a forming surface of the upper mold.

27. (New) The apparatus of Claim 26, wherein the moving means is placed in an outer periphery of the upper mold.

28. (New) The apparatus of Claim 27, wherein the forcible releasing means is positioned away from the forming surface of the upper mold such that the forcible releasing means is in non-contact with the molded article, when the upper and the lower mold are approached.

29. (New) The apparatus of Claim 28, wherein the moving means comprises a spring.

30. (New) The apparatus of Claim 29, wherein the regulator comprises a drum.

31. (New) The apparatus of Claim 30, wherein the regulator guides vertical movement of the forcible releasing means.

32. (New) The apparatus of Claim 31, wherein the regulator guides movement of at least one of the upper mold or the lower mold by a clearance of 2 to 10 m.

33. (New) A method of manufacturing an optical element by press molding a glass material with an upper mold and a lower mold, wherein each of the upper mold and the lower mold comprises an upper forming surface and a lower forming surface, respectively, comprising:

press molding a heated glass material with the upper mold and the lower mold such that an outer diameter of a molded article becomes larger than an outer diameter of the upper forming surface,

cooling the molded article,

separating the upper mold and the lower mold from each other,

wherein the axes of the upper mold and the lower mold are regulated by a regulator in the press molding step, and

in the separating unit, moving a forcible releasing means relative to the upper mold such that the forcible releasing means contacts a rim of the molded article adhered to the upper forming surface and releases the molded article from the upper forming surface.

34. (New) The method of Claim 33, wherein the regulator comprises a drum.

35. (New) The method of Claim 34, wherein the upper mold moves downward to follow shrinkage of the molded article in the cooling step.

36. (New) The method of Claim 35, wherein the upper mold, the lower mold and the glass material are heated to temperatures in a range corresponding to the viscosity of the glass material of 10^8 to 10^{12} poises, prior to the press molding step, and the separating step is carried out when the molded article is cooled to a temperature not higher than the transition temperature of the glass material.

37. (New) The method of Claim 36, wherein the heated glass material is transferred to the forming surface of the heated lower mold, prior to the press molding step.

38. (New) The method of Claim 37, wherein the heated glass material is floated by a gas and is transferred to the heated forming surface of the lower mold.